

Reporter

Superfund Records Center
SITE: Chlor Alkali
BREAK: 13.3
OTHER: 541297

RECEIVED

JAN 08 2004

The Berlin Reporter
© 2003
December 31, 2003

State wants to Superfund site

By Tom Rideout

BERLIN— On December 17, the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) notified the city of Berlin of its intent to have the former Cell House site in Berlin listed on the United States Environmental Protection Agency's Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Information System (CERLIS) list, thus allowing the state to receive assistance from the federal government.

The notification outlined the process NHDES has undertaken and why NHDES seeks help from the government. The cell house site is located on the East Side of the Androscoggin River, west of Hutchins Street and south of Bridge Street. The site housed a cell house from 1900 to 1950, which manufactured chlorine and alkaline used in the manufacturing process of paper. A major ingredient used in the process was mercury, which eventually contaminated the site and surrounding area.

After the site ceased to produce chlorine gas, the owners of the property monitored and conducted numerous site investigations to learn the extent of the contamination. As of late, especially since 1997, the former owners of the property determined contamination was widespread, including the groundwater with lead, chloroform, arsenic, dichloromethane as well as mercury.

One major effort to reclaim some of the contamination involved removing raw mercury from crevices and fissures in the river's bottom.

Previous owners have destroyed the former cell house and capped the area to prevent rainwater from saturating the area and possibly spreading contaminants elsewhere.

In 2002, the sale of the Berlin and Gorham mills and their adjacent properties was expedited by the state taking over the cell house site. Bankruptcy deemed that no viable owner or owners were known to be responsible for the site. The understanding, at that time, was that NHDES would take responsibility for the cleanup of the site.

Investigations and research has concluded that it will cost several million dollars to keep up the site, which the state of NH says is beyond its means. By listing the site as a CERLIS site, the state would have the USEPA as a partner in assessing and cleaning up the site.

The letter stated that the city needs to do nothing to help the state in the process but noted that the state may ask the city to maintain its support when the application is reviewed by USEPA.



SDMS DocID

541297